



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office

Preserving The Biological Diversity Of The Great Basin, Eastern Sierra & Mojave Desert

Questions and Answers

Sand Mountain Blue Butterfly 90-Day Finding

Q. What is the Sand Mountain blue butterfly?

A. The Sand Mountain blue butterfly is a small, pale-blue butterfly in the Lycaenidae family. Males have a wingspan that ranges from 0.39 to 0.45 inches and averages 0.44 in. The back is pale bluish-violet with a narrow black outer margin. The bottom surface of the male abdomen is chalky white. Females have a wingspan that ranges from 0.39 to 0.46 in with an average of 0.43 in. The back is brown to tan, and usually pale bluish-gray on both wings. The forewing has a faint brown bar, while the hind wing has marginal dots.

Q. What is the Sand Mountain blue butterfly's habitat?

A. The Sand Mountain blue butterfly is known only to occur at Sand Mountain, a dune system located in Churchill County, Nevada, about 25 miles east of the city of Fallon, in close association with its host plant, Kearney buckwheat. Kearney buckwheat is a long-lived, perennial shrub with numerous branches that occurs in scattered locations in several western states. The plant typically occurs at Sand Mountain as a dominant or co-dominant with other shrubs on smaller dunes around the periphery of the main dune. Kearney buckwheat is the sole food source for the larvae and an important nectar source for adults during their flight period.

Kearney buckwheat is widespread in Nevada and also occurs in Utah, Arizona, and California. Several reconnaissance surveys of sand dunes have been conducted within a 62.5 mile radius of Sand Mountain in search of populations of the Kearney buckwheat large enough to support a population of the butterfly. No Kearney buckwheat plants have been observed on any of these surveys, and the surveyors concluded that if the plant were present, its population is so small that it would not provide suitable habitat for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly, and that no other habitat exists within the flight range of the butterfly.

Q. Has the population of Sand Mountain Blue butterfly declined?

The Sand Mountain butterfly is known only from Sand Mountain, Nevada, where it is closely associated with its host shrub, the Kearney buckwheat, which is the only food for the butterfly larvae. An estimated 50 percent reduction of the butterfly's habitat has occurred over the past 25 years. Much of this remaining habitat has been highly fragmented by over 200 miles of off-road vehicle routes. Because of the complete dependency of the larvae of the Sand Mountain blue butterfly on the Kearney buckwheat, the Service is confident that the population of the butterfly has also been substantially reduced over this time period.

Q. Where is the Sand Mountain blue butterfly found?

A. The Sand Mountain blue butterfly occurs on an estimated 1,000 acres within and adjacent to

the 4,795 acre Sand Mountain Recreation Area (SMRA) managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Q. Why did the Service complete a 90-day finding under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly?

A. On April 23, 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received a formal petition from the Center for Biological Diversity, Xerces Society, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, and the Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association. The petition requested that the Sand Mountain blue butterfly, known only from Sand Mountain, Nevada, be listed as threatened or endangered in accordance with Section 4 of the Act, and that critical habitat be designated for the species concurrent with the listing. On September 26, 2005, the Service received a 60-day notice of intent to sue, and on January 5, 2006, a suit was filed regarding the Service's failure to carry out the 90-day and 12-month findings on the status of the Sand Mountain blue butterfly within the statutory deadline set by the Act.

Q. What were the results of the Sand Mountain blue butterfly 90-day finding?

A. The Service found that the petition presented enough information to initiate a status review to determine if listing is warranted as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Q. Will the 90-day finding impact off-road vehicle use at the Sand Mountain Recreation Area?

A. No, the 90-day finding is only the first step in a process to determine if listing the Sand Mountain blue butterfly as either threatened or endangered is warranted under the Act.

Q. Are there conservation measures underway for the Sand Mountain Blue butterfly?

Yes, on August 18, 2004, the Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance (LVEA) initiated a public planning effort to develop a conservation plan for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly. Participants in the working group included representatives from the LVEA, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the City of Fallon, Churchill County, the Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe (Tribe), the Friends of Sand Mountain (FOSM), the California Off-Road Vehicle Association (CORVA), the United States Naval Air Station Fallon, and private citizens.

The purpose of this effort is to provide long term protection for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly and its habitat; particularly, its host plant, Kearney buckwheat. The Conservation Plan and Agreement identifies specific actions that are necessary to: 1) eliminate or reduce known threats, 2) incorporate species conservation measures into planning and management activities; 3) educate permittees and recreation users, and, 4) monitor species status trends and habitat quality and requirements. One such action is the designation of a mandatory route system to halt further degradation of butterfly habitat. If successfully implemented this plan could preclude the potential need to list the Sand Mountain blue butterfly as threatened or endangered.

The Tribal Council has provided the working group with a resolution in support of the conservation plan. Both FOSM and CORVA, who represent the recreational user groups, have agreed to sign the plan. Following approval by both the City of Fallon and Churchill County; the above entities, as well as the BLM and FWS will sign the Plan. LVEA has secured an \$800,000 State Conservation Grant to assist in implementing portions of the plan. Information on the conservation planning process is available at:

<http://www.lvea.org/workgroups/Blue%20Butterfly/index.htm>

Q. Where can more information about the Sand Mountain blue butterfly including copies of the petition finding be found?

Copies of the 90-day finding are available on the internet at <http://fws.gov/nevada>, or by calling us at (775) 861-6300.

Q How can new information or comments be included in the status review?

A. The Service is soliciting comments, suggestions, and additional information to ensure the status review is complete and based on the best scientific information. Comments, suggestions, or information on the historical and current status and distribution of the butterfly, its biology and ecology, ongoing conservation measures for the species and its habitat, and threats to the species and its habitat will be accepted until **October 10, 2006**. These comments or information should be sent to: Field Supervisor, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Blvd, Suite 234, Reno, NV 89502 or by email to sandmtblue@fws.gov.